DARK HORSE
20 YEARS
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
116 $2.99 US
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY: 5 OF 6
EAGLE AWARDS 2006 WINNER
color pinup by
AARON RENIER
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS

lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO

cover colors by DAN JACKSON

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge.

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

DŌA

Dōa, an Ittō-*ryū* warrior, is slowly befriending Rin, with neither of them knowing their real connection.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality.

BURANDO

Deranged medical examiner, saved from prison by Kagimura.

YAMADA ASAEMON

Nicknamed "Kubikiri Asa," the shogun's executioner is an expert sword tester and a limb-cutting connoisseur.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Lured to Kagimura's *bakufu* stronghold near Edo Castle, Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and imprisoned in an underground cell. Seeking to impart the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human, Kagimura orders his medical examiners to discover the secrets of Manji's regenerative abilities. His crazed, star surgeon, Ayame Burando, struggles with the deaths of two prisoners and attempts to retain his focus as the immortality experiments go awry.

designers DEBRA BAILEY and SCOTT COOK editorial assistant RYAN JORGENSEN

editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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無限の住人

ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY

-part five-

KURIFU'S
DEAD?!

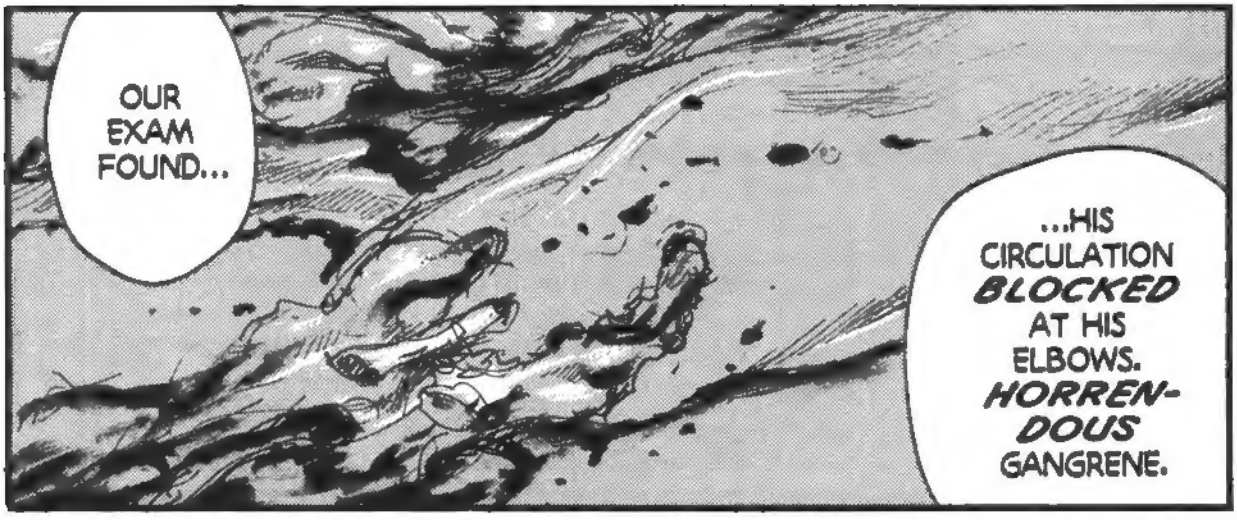
Y-YES, SIR.
JUST NOW--

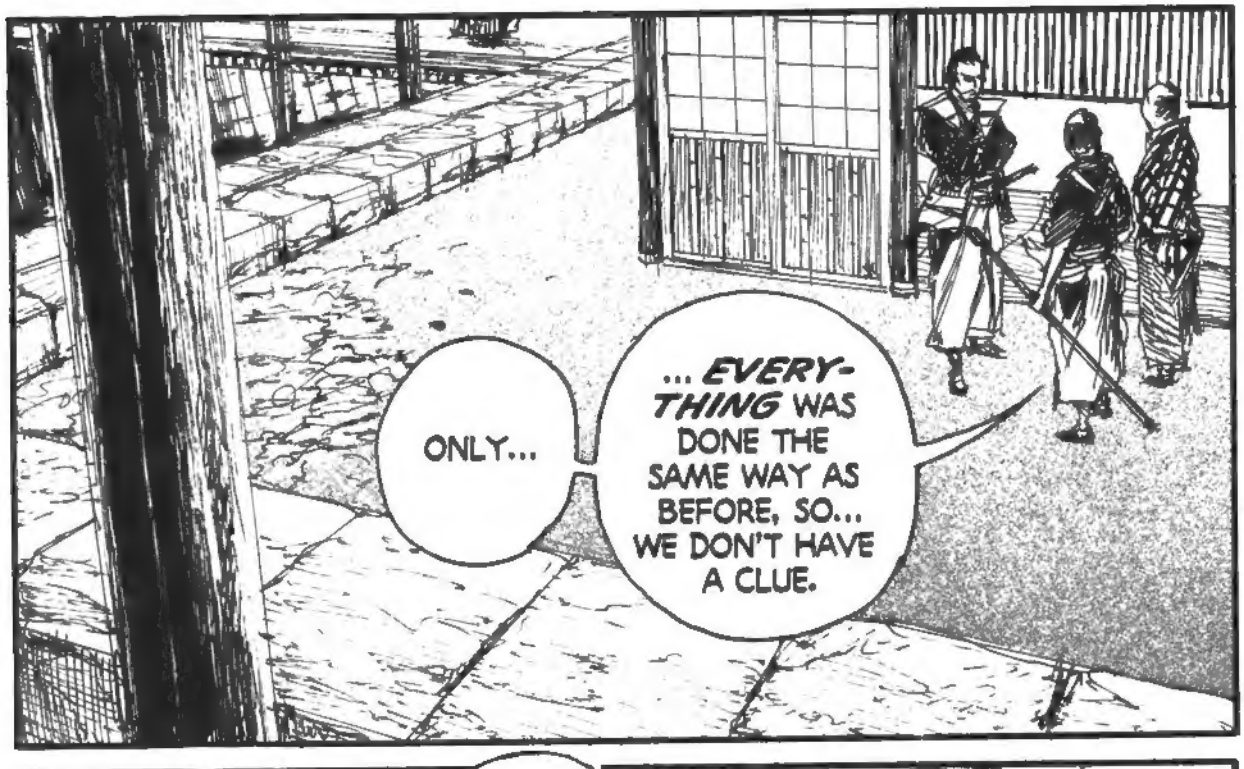
TELL ME EVERY-THING!

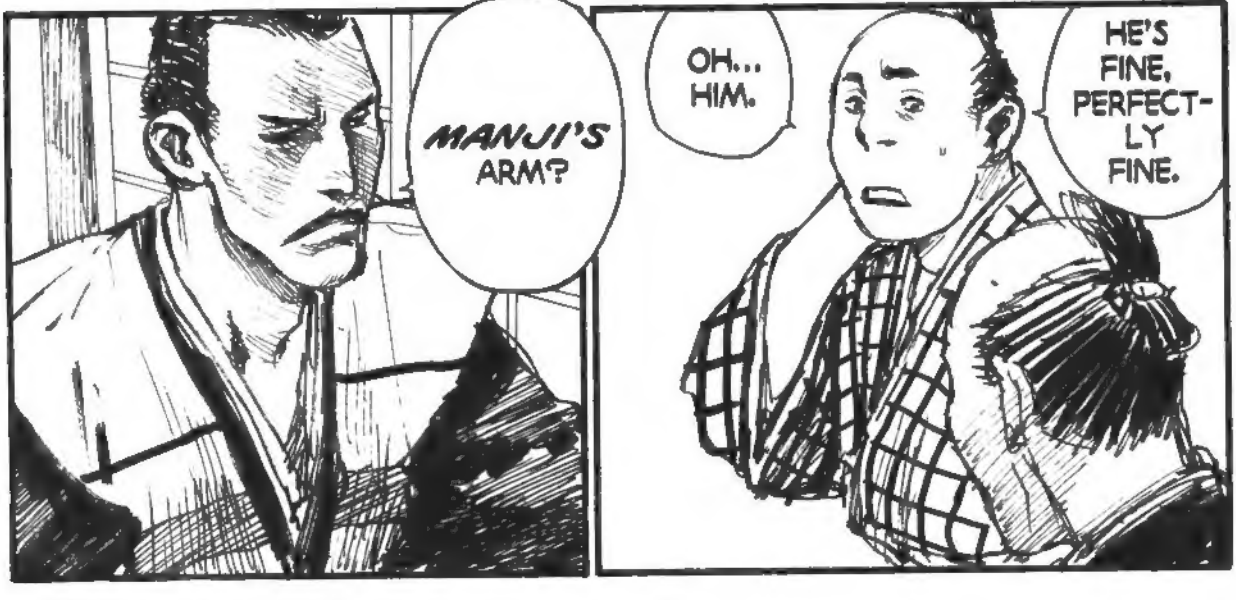
...AAHHHN...

WHAT... IS THIS...?
WHY'D IT HAPPEN?
CAN I SWING YET?
DEWA-NOSUKE WAS... FINE.
HE WAS JUST FINE! RIGHT?!

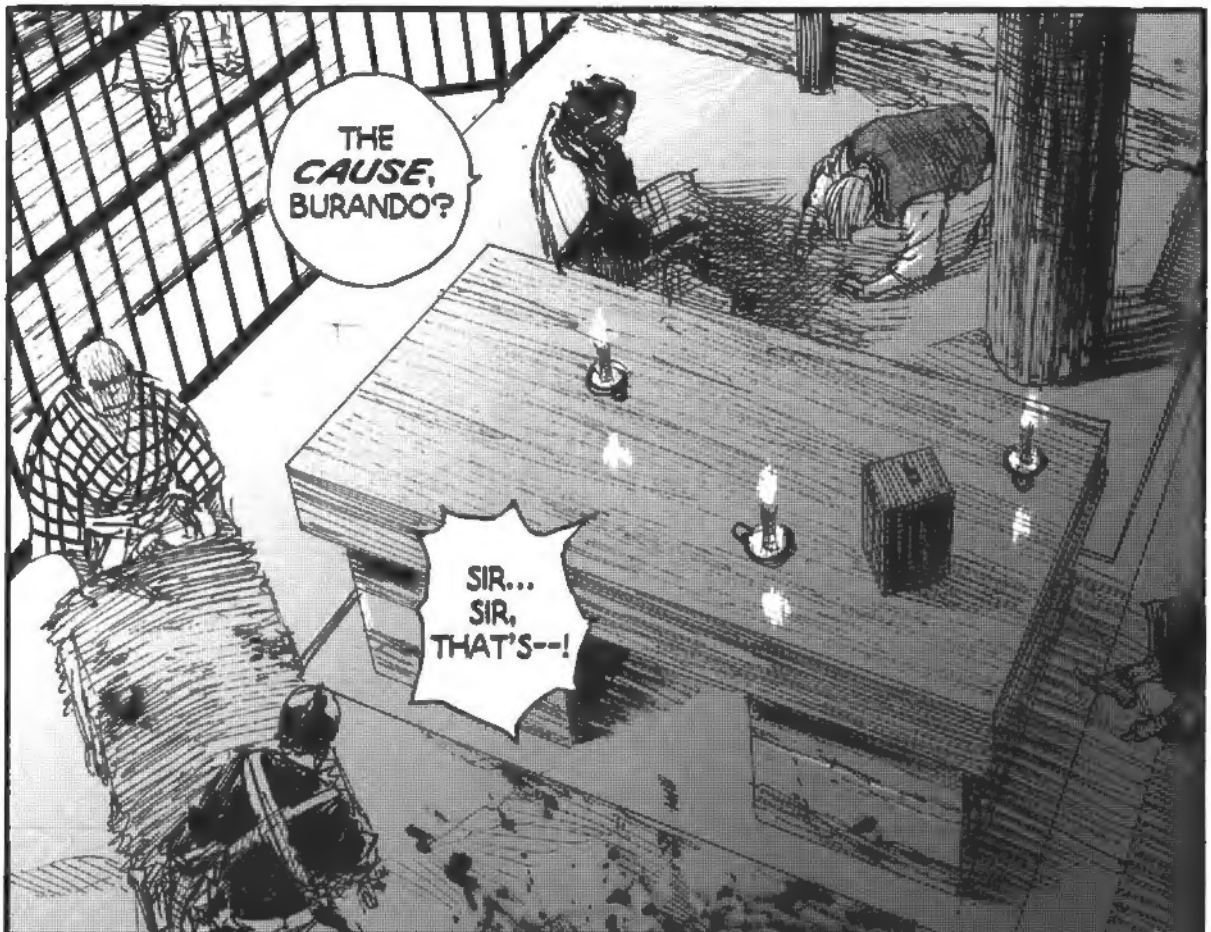
.....
.....
.....
...IF... IF YOU DON'T FIX MANJI'S ARM...
BURANDO-DONO...
...EVERY-THING'LL BE RUINED.
HRKK!


OUR EXAM FOUND...
...HIS CIRCULATION *BLOCKED* AT HIS ELBOWS. *HORREN-DOUS* GANGRENE.


ONLY...
...*EVERY-THING* WAS DONE THE SAME WAY AS BEFORE, SO... WE DON'T HAVE A CLUE.

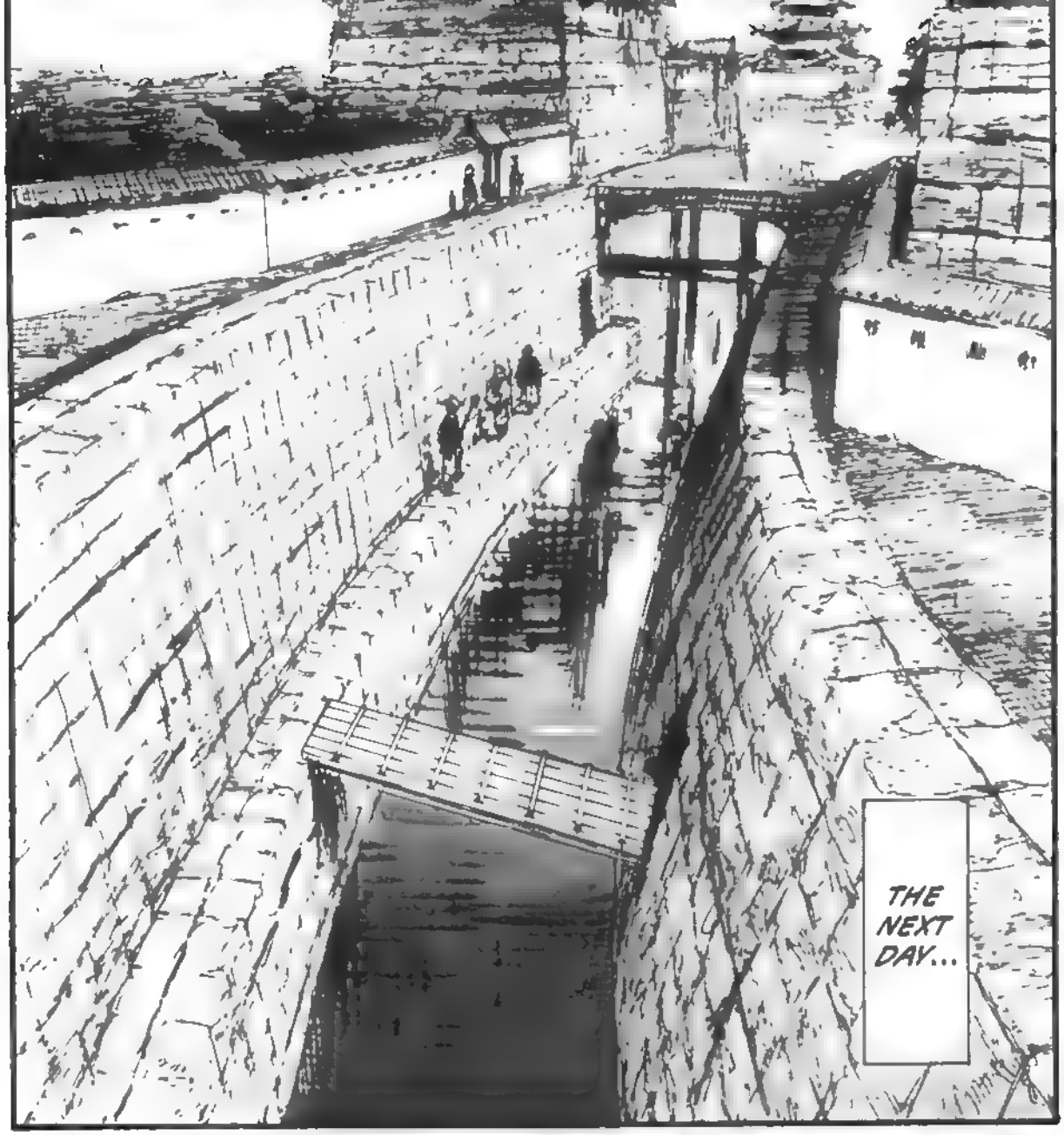

MANJI'S ARM?
OH... HIM.
HE'S FINE, PERFECT-LY FINE.

AND BURANDO'S STILL DOWN THERE?


THE *CAUSE*, BURANDO?
SIR... SIR, THAT'S--!

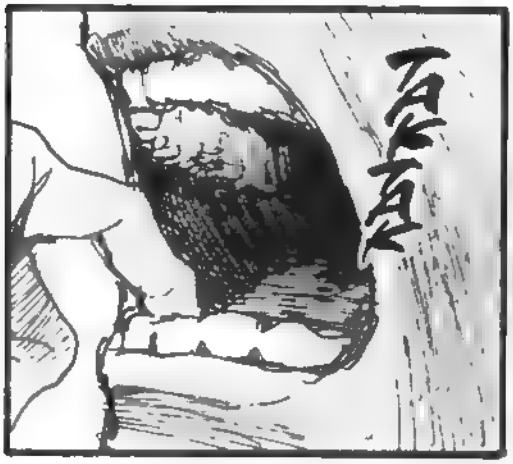
IT'S... A MYSTERY...
.....
.....
.....
NO!
I... I HAVE SOME IDEAS!
FOR INSTANCE... IF KURIFU HARBORED SOME DISEASE!
IF IT HADN'T MANIFESTED...AND MANJI'S FLESH TRIGGERED IT...?
SOMETHING... LIKE THAT. BUT... BUT IN TRUTH...
...I'M SHAMED TO SAY I DIDN'T EXPECT FAILURE.
I WASN'T READY FOR BOTH ARMS...
...TO ROT.

I LET HIM BLEED OUT!
THEN I LET HIM DIE!
HMM. BUT IF THAT'S SO...
...EVEN IF YOU SAVED THE MAN...
...HE WAS STILL AN INAP-PROPRIATE SUBJECT.
HRMM...


THE NEXT DAY...

THE THIRD FELON, KŌNO-KURA.

THE LAST TIME YOU WERE SICK?
CAN'T SAY. TEN YEARS AGO...?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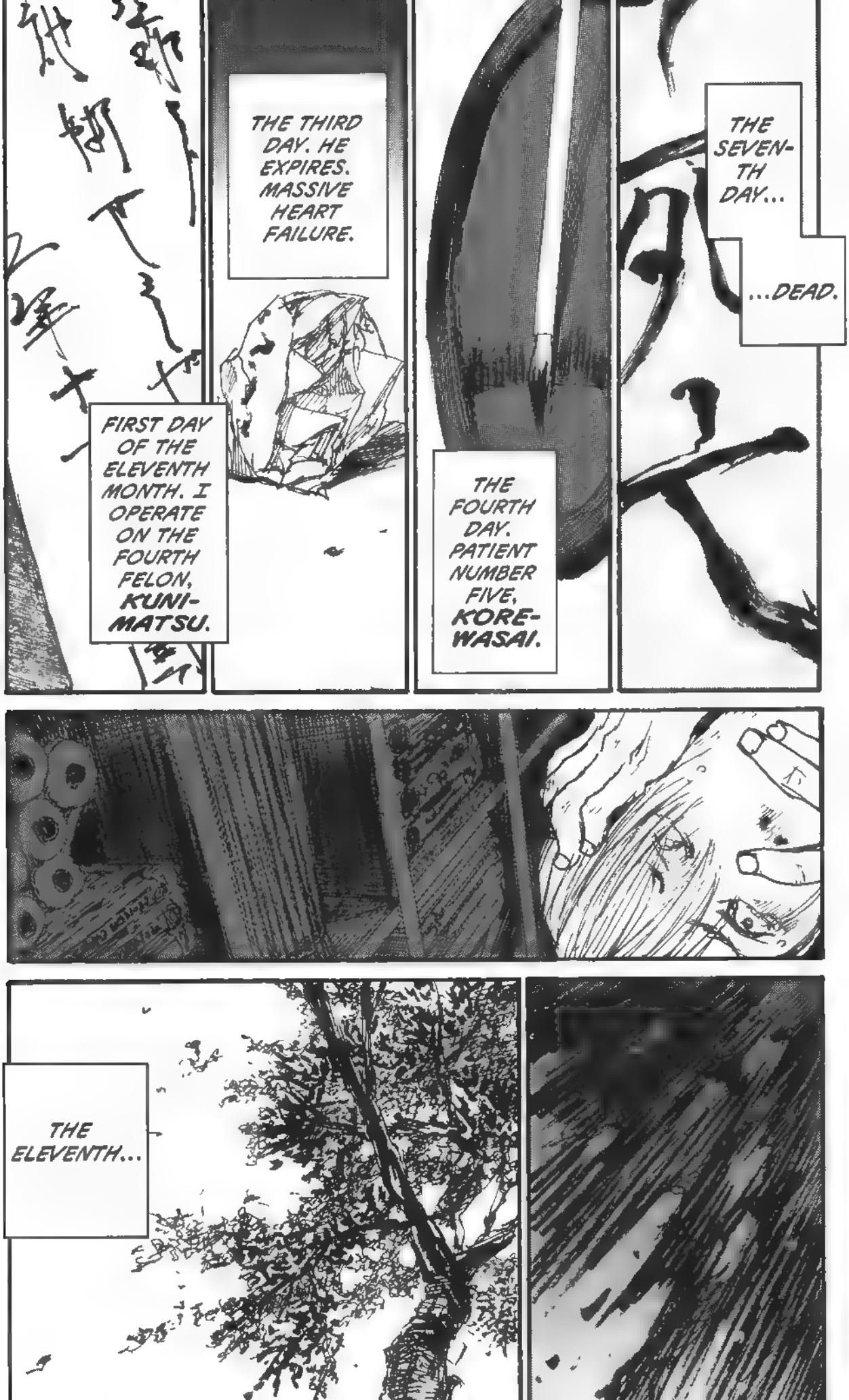
IS THAT SO...?

SEN-
SEI!
GNUK!
UGGK!
IT
DOESN'T
MAKE
SENSE!

YOU KILLED ANOTHER ONE ??
BURAN-DO ?!
HRRRNG...


FIRST DAY OF THE ELEVENTH MONTH. I OPERATE ON THE FOURTH FELON, KUNI-MATSU.
THE THIRD DAY. HE EXPIRES. MASSIVE HEART FAILURE.
THE FOURTH DAY. PATIENT NUMBER FIVE, KORE-WASAI.
THE SEVEN-TH DAY...
...DEAD.
THE ELEVENTH...

...WHY...?

WHY...?

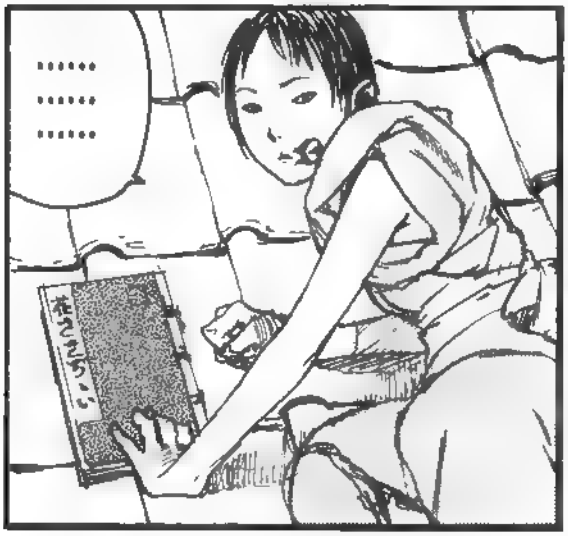
WHY ARE YOU DYING?
WHYYY ?!
GYAARRGH! ALL OF YOU!!
STOP DYINNGGG !!
OOMPHH
I'M CALLED THE DEATH GOD, BUT MY, MY...
...THIS LAD HAS THE TOUCH.

THE CURSE OF DEWA-NOSUKE, GENERAL?
...RUBBISH...
BURAN-DO...

...IT'S TIME YOU REST THOSE BONES.

MUTENICHI-RYŪ DŌJŌ

.....
.....
.....



BOOK TITLE:
HANASAKA JII

YOU, TOO, HYAKURIN... EVEN WITH YOUR INJURY.
HEY, IT'S JUST MY ARM, RIGHT?
YOU'RE HANG-ING IN THERE, RIN.
A WHOLE MONTH NOW.
BUT WE'VE LOOKED JUST ABOUT EVERY-WHERE.
IF WE COME UP DRY AT SHAKUJII TODAY, WE'RE SCREWED.

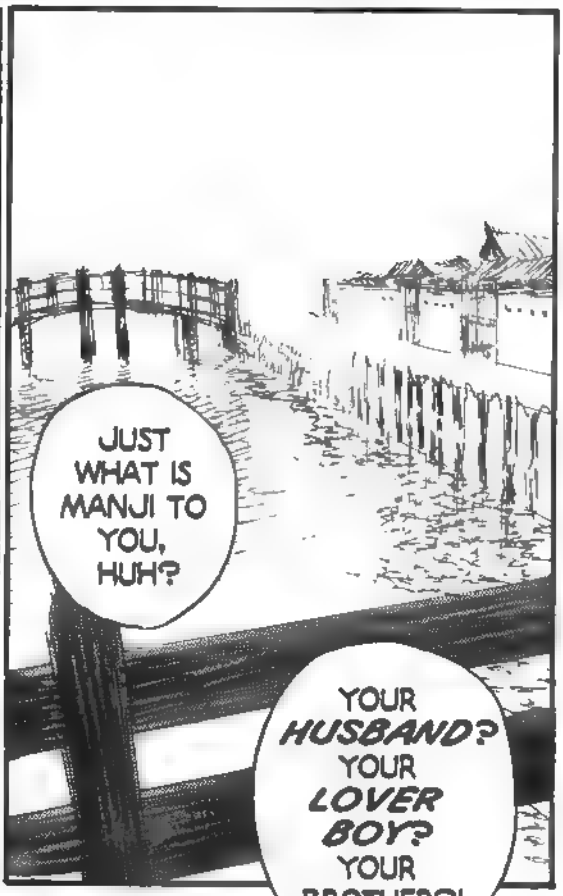
ANOTHER HAN...?
WELL, IF THAT'S IT...
...WE'RE OUT OF LUCK...
OUT OF LUCK?!
TWO PEOPLE, SEARCHING FOR EACH OTHER?
THEY'LL FIND EACH OTHER, AS LONG AS THEY STILL LIVE!
YOU'RE BROKE, RIGHT?
JUST... GIVE IT UP, AL-READY.
IF HE'S IN ANOTHER HAN, I'LL GO TO ANOTHER HAN!
I HARD-LY EXPECT...
...YOU TO GO WITH ME.

AUUG!
OUOHH!
HEEEK!

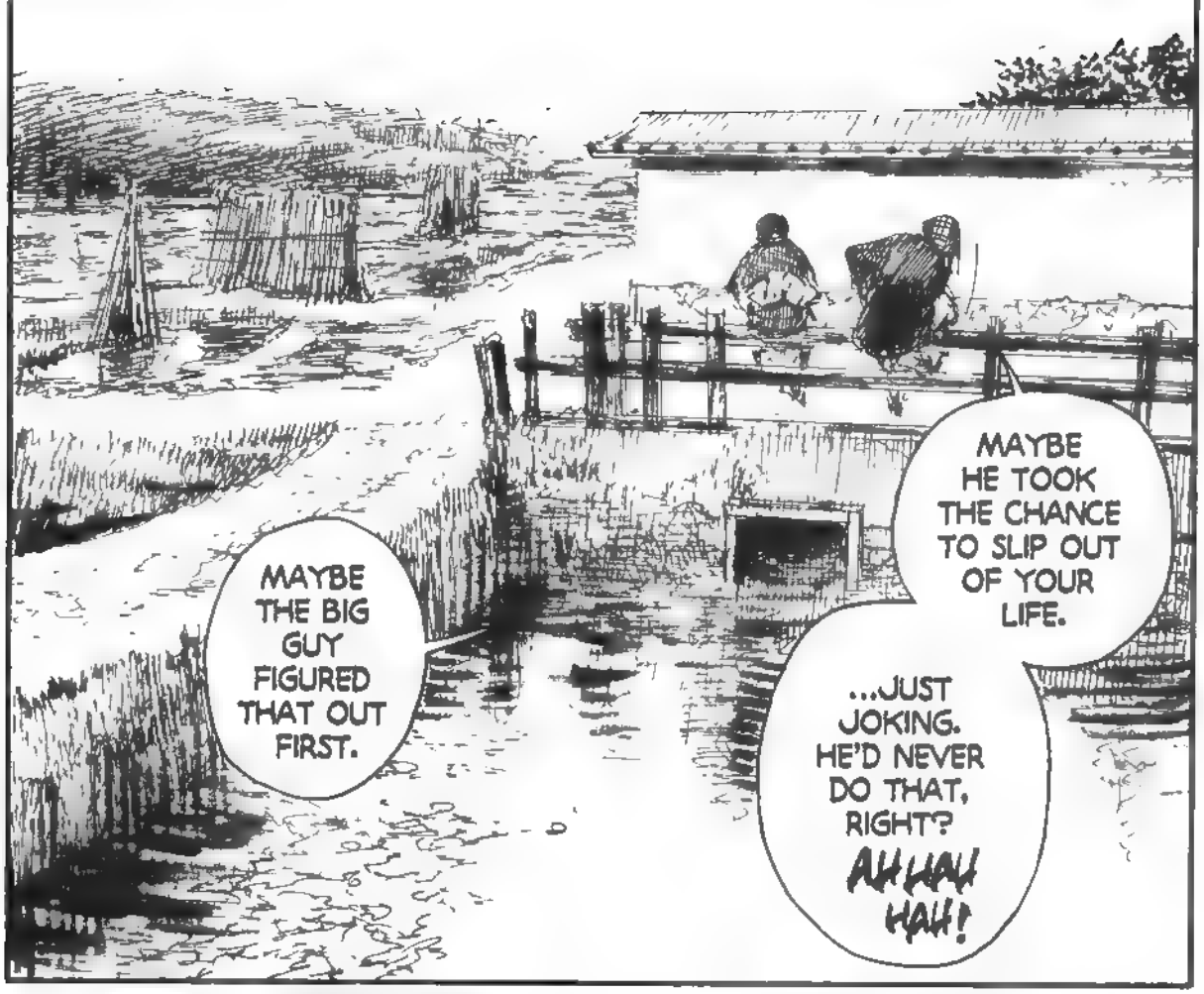
YOU LITTLE IDIOT!!
AREN'T YOU OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW...
...WHAT'S POSSIBLE AND WHAT'S NOT?!

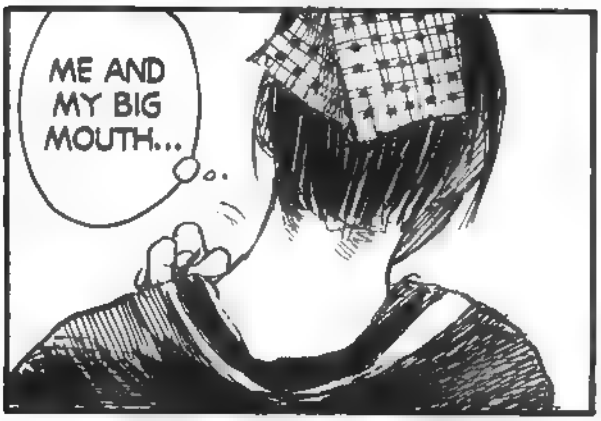
.....
.....
.....

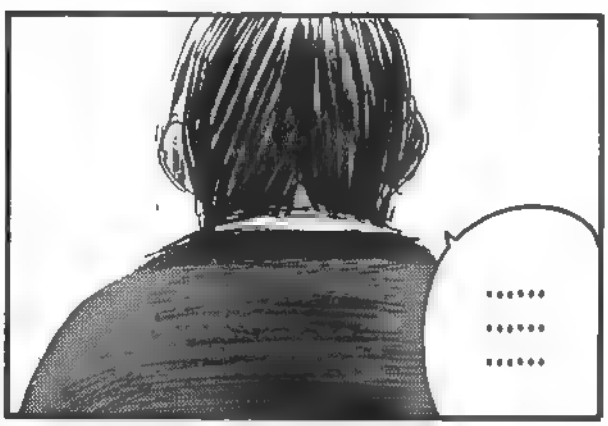
HNF!
ALL HOT, LIKE SOME FARM GIRL IN LOVE.


JUST WHAT IS MANJI TO YOU, HUH?
YOUR HUSBAND? YOUR LOVER BOY? YOUR BROTHER?!

BUT--!
THE ITTO-RYŪ'S ON THE SKIDS.
WHAT'S LEFT FOR YOU AND MANJI TO TEAM UP FOR?
NO ONE KNOWS WHERE ANOTSU'S GONE.
HE'S A HIRED BODY-GUARD!
NOT ONE DAMN THING.
IS THAT THE KIND OF GUY YOU SACRIFICE YOUR LIFE FOR?!
RUMOR HAS IT HE'S DEAD.


MAYBE THE BIG GUY FIGURED THAT OUT FIRST.
MAYBE HE TOOK THE CHANCE TO SLIP OUT OF YOUR LIFE.
...JUST JOKING. HE'D NEVER DO THAT, RIGHT? AH HA HA HA!


ME AND MY BIG MOUTH...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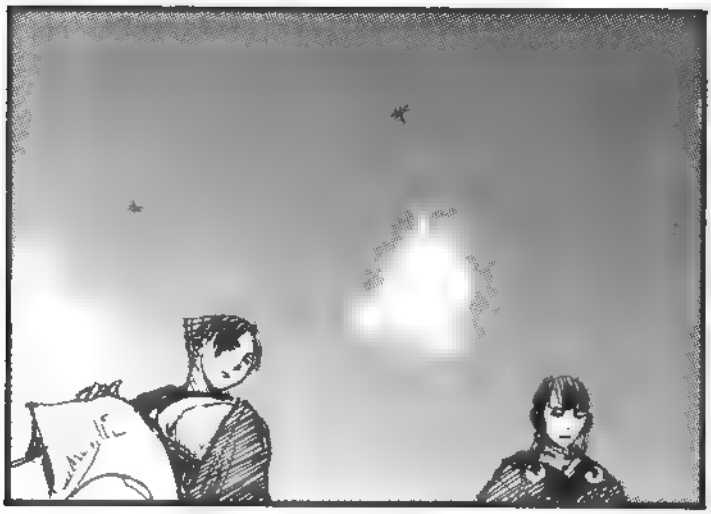


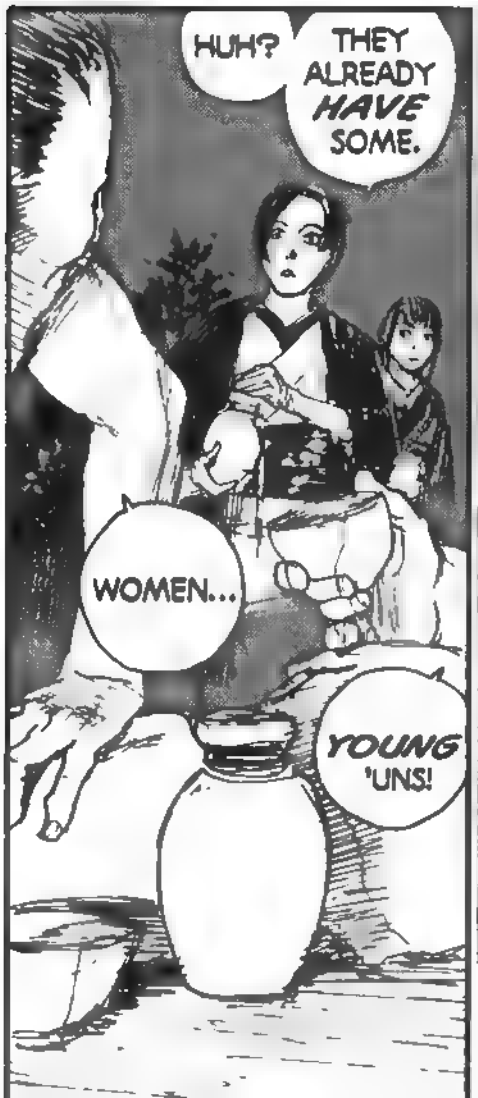
OH, WELL.
IF YOU INSIST ON GOING...

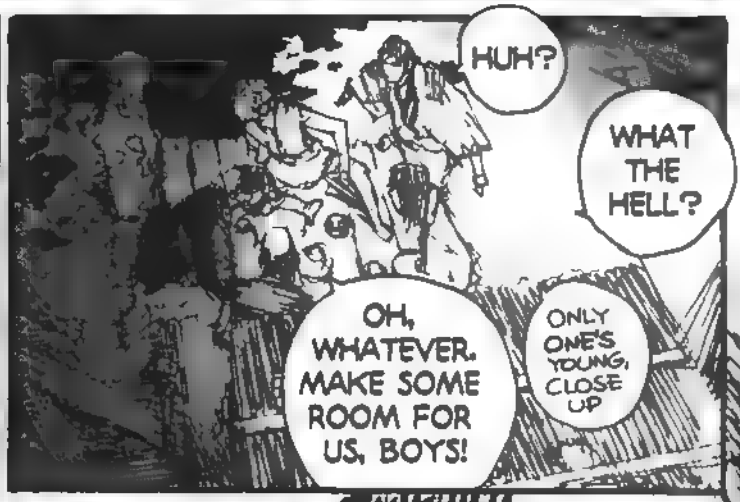
...WHY THE HELL *NOT!*
WE CAN BEG *TOGETHER*, IN FRONT OF YOUR *PAINTER SENSEI.*

NOPE, NEVER SEEN 'EM... NOT A ONE.
WHAT'RE THOSE BLACK THINGS?
GLASSES. BLACK GLASSES.
I'LL BE DAMNED. AT NIGHT, TOO?
YUP.
UHMM...
EVEN IF THEY DON'T LOOK LIKE THIS, HAS ANYONE MOVED HERE RECENTLY?
CAN'T SAY... DON'T LIVE HERE, ACTUALLY.
WHERE?
THERE'S A BUNCH OF BEGGARS, THOUGH, CAMPING OUT.
THE RIVER-BANK. OVER THERE.

IT STINKS.

...HWUH?
EXCUSE ME? WE'RE LOOKING FOR--
OH... SORRY 'BOUT THE EYES.
HYAKURIN. THERE'S A FIRE.
NOW *THAT'S* A TIME SAVER. POUR THEM A DRINK OR TWO, AND WE MIGHT GET SOME LEADS.
MONEY FOR *SAKE?*
UH, YES. JUST A LITTLE...


HUH?
THEY ALREADY *HAVE* SOME.
WOMEN...
YOUNG 'UNS!


HUH?
WHAT THE HELL?
OH, WHATEVER. MAKE SOME ROOM FOR US, BOYS!
ONLY ONE'S YOUNG, CLOSE UP

KIND SIRS. SORRY. I KNOW IT'S DARK, BUT...

GIICHI?

TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH:
ON THE PERFECTION OF ANATOMY, Part 6 of 6

The conclusion to Hiroaki Samura's *On the Perfection of Anatomy* story arc, and . the return of Gichi! Rin and Hyakurin have found one of their missing friends, but do they really want to know what he's been up to since the Mugai-*ryû* disbanded? Rin, tortured over Manji's disappearance, is determined to check every clue and look into every lead, but disturbing Edo Castle is tantamount to suicide. Samura s hilarious "Biography" piece continues, accompanied by hard-to-find Samura pinups–extras found only in this monthly series! We'll also see our first back cover pinup by Stan Shaw, a stylish look at Rin, which is the first of four *Blade of the Immortal* back covers that will link together to form an exciting *quadtych* image!

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū.*

Banshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of higher rank.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Fusama: Sliding doors between rooms, made of wood and rice paper.

Han: A feudal domain.

Hanasaka Jū: Known more commonly today as *Hanasaka Jiisan*, one of the five most popular children's stories immortalized in Edo Period picture books. A good-hearted old man finds buried treasure, but his mean-hearted neighbor digs up only trash.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kaizō Shigi: Ayame Burando's journal. He is writing *On the Perfection of Anatomy*, a record of his medical experiments.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school.

Toshū: Leader; master.

Yamada Asaemon: Nicknamed Kubikiri Asa, the shogun's executioner was a master swordsman, sword tester, and an expert at beheading and cutting human bodies.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *sauvastika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *sauvastika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

BIOGRAPHY

of Hiroaki Samura, Part Two

(Translated by Riko Frohnmayer)

In 1979, members of the manga unit Thunder Aquarius (predecessor of the legendary Hiroaki Samura) rented an apartment to use as their work studio in Bristol. However, a problem arose immediately . . . when one of the members of their unit, Little Nikita, discovered that he would not be able to fit into the building due to his abnormal height of forty-eight feet, eight inches. The rest of the members came to the painful, yet inevitable, conclusion to fire him. (The legend of Hiroaki Samura's frequent inkerist changes started with that decision.)

Thunder Aquarius set up auditions to search for a new inkerist to replace Nikita. During these auditions, the unit found the best inkerist they had ever encountered in their lives. His name was Blizzard Rose. Recalling their first encounter with Rose, Sniper Lee said, "I was dead drunk and asleep on my couch. Then someone poked me on the shoulder to wake me up. It was Rose. He'd just heard of our auditions earlier in the day. He looked like an angel. I loved him instantly and asked him to show me his drawing technique. I knew immediately that he was the one."

When the unit welcomed Rose, they again, changed their name to Mysterious Vagabonds.

In March 1980, Mysterious Vagabonds opened a show at the Marquee in London. However, an unfortunate incident was about to occur. At the show, one of the audience members yelled out, saying that he was a much better inkerist than Rose. Rose took his challenge and demanded that the man demonstrate his drawing skills. Backstage, the guy from the audience drew one whole page. Then, as soon as he finished drawing, he started breaking every physical object in the room–from his brushes to the furniture. Funny thing was, all the members (except Rose, of course) fell in love with this stranger's recklessness and decided to hire the newcomer and fire Rose. The bloke's name was Ian A. Ian.

Again, seeing this as another opportunity, they changed the unit's name to Mr. Bation. They were gradually evolving toward their debut as a professional manga team . . .

(Continues next issue . . .)

One of Hiroaki Samura's founding members, Sniper Lee (storyboards).

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222

www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com

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MAKIE

Pinup by Aaron Renier, nominee for the 2006 Russ Manning Most Promising Newcomer Award and two 2006 Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards—Talent Deserving of Wider Recognition and Best Publication for a Younger Audience (for his *Spiral Bound* graphic novel).

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KRYPTONIA-DGP